

FOREIGN DEPARTMENT

IN CHARGE OF

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THE PROGRESS OF GERMAN NURSES

THE photograph of Sister Agnes Karll, president of the German Nurses' Organization, which appears with this article, shows a woman of rare capacity and character, whose practical ability, intellectual force, and broad, liberal, clear-sighted judgment would make her a power in any circle, so that it may well be a matter of deep satisfaction to nurses, and especially the nurses of Germany, to know that she belongs to them and that her whole soul is thrown unreservedly into the active struggle of upbuilding and self-development which is taking place in the nursing profession in many countries and with special earnestness in Germany.

For the study of the development of nursing and of the forms under which nurses are organized and trained Germany is the most instructive and interesting country in the world, because there one can see a whole series of evolutions by which, step by step, the changes have been made between the nursing orders of nuns and the modern trained nurse. There are the deaconess institutions, and the Red Cross training-schools, and the Victoria House and Eppendorf, and the Diakonie-Verein, and now the new public hospitals, and, finally, the organization of which Sister Karll is the head, each of which marks a fresh stage, not only as to the personal liberty of the nurse, but also in her general training and preparation for self-support. As I am sure many American nurses do not know the general plan of German nursing life, I think it can perhaps be made clearer by an illustration.

Let us suppose we had the general system of Germany at home, and we will take the Presbyterian Hospital and Miss Maxwell for our illustration. It would be like this: At the time when the hospital was built the directors and medical staff and Miss Maxwell would have agreed to have a nursing association, of which they would be the officers. Then, as probationers came, Miss Maxwell would say to them, "At the end of your training you can, if you wish, leave us and work for yourselves. But it will be much more advantageous for you to join our association and be one of our sisters (nurses), because then you will always have your home here, or at least your headquarters, and we will give you your

living and a salary and send you either to private duty or district nursing or hospital work. If you work independently, you can never get good hospital positions or army nursing work, because such calls never go to private independent nurses, they always come to associations. Then after you have worked for us for a certain number of years if you lose your health we will take care of you, or if you keep well we will help you to an old-age pension or give you a home in our own quarters. But if you leave us before this certain number of years, then you lose all claim on us and cease to be one of our nurses."

If the probationers accept this offer, that is, of course roughly outlined, what is meant in Germany by belonging to a nursing association. It is very different from belonging to an association in America, which means an *alumnæ* or a county or a State society. The only thing in Germany which is like our own societies is the German Nurses' Organization, which is similar to one of our State societies having individual membership, as nurses from the entire State (Empire) are eligible to join it. As to what we call *alumnæ* associations and the English nurses call leagues, there is no such thing existing in Germany.

The various changes by which the different nursing associations have been marked are most interesting. Each new one was a little less narrow and rigid than the last. We know how strict the life of the religious sister is. The deaconess was a great step towards modern freedom. She could marry at any time, and if she had money of her own, she kept it in her own control, and though she was consecrated by a church ceremony she took no vows, but only made renewable promises.

The Catholic clergy thought the deaconess movement quite revolutionary and disapproved highly of it, just as the Lutheran pastors in their turn disapprove of all modern secular training.

There was a great deal that was very sweet in the early deaconess movement. It was founded on the family idea—the Oberin (matron or head of nurses) was the mother, the pastor was the father, and the deaconesses were the children. The great word used to impress and influence the deaconess was *humility*, and a pet phrase of the old pastors was "self-sacrificing love." If I have read these words once in the annals and reports I am sure I have read them five thousand times. The hardships, overwork, long hours and loss of sleep, and complete deprivation of all intellectual and social pleasures were extreme in the deaconess orders, and these words were continually used to keep them from thinking. No reading was permitted save that of religious books, and, in a word, freedom of thought was not permitted. This I have been told by many nurses. It is also quite evident from the books, reports, and articles by pastors which I have read.

The deaconess houses are very conscientious in the care of their old sisters, but their treatment of young sisters seems to me often shocking. For instance, a German nurse told me that she had been taken into a deaconess house at fifteen years of age, and at sixteen she was on night duty and was sent out to emergency cases. Of twelve other young girls of her own age who entered at about the same time she is the only one who (she is now twenty-six) retains her health enough to work. Probationers so young as this are not uncommon in deaconess institutions. When the time comes for consecrating them (at twenty-two) they are very often deemed unsuited, or feel themselves unwilling to bind themselves, and they are then turned quite adrift, and as many of them have been taken from simple country homes, even peasant homes, they have often drifted into big cities quite without any knowledge of how to provide for themselves or protect themselves. Another thing that is hard is that older women, after giving their labor through the four or five years required before finally joining, are then sometimes turned off on grounds of unsuitability, but really because the institution finds it probable that they will soon be invalided and become a charge. This from their standpoint is reasonable enough, but hard on the woman, for up to a few years ago it was almost impossible for a nurse to take up independent work as we do in America on account of social prejudices and customs.

Next, as a result of wars, the Red Cross movement spread over Germany, and, taken as a whole, marked a notable advance in the progress of women, for fully nine-tenths of all its work was done by women, and they assumed responsible public duties in the establishment of hospitals and training-schools. Many such institutions were founded, the money raised, and the administration carried on by women's societies, and with the Oberin or matron as chief executive officer. The extreme religious limitations disappeared, and a more liberal atmosphere prevailed, allowing greater development for personal characteristics. The weak points of this fresh advance were that the necessity of earning money by the services of the pupils prevented improvement in the course of study and training, and also that money reasons made it quite impossible for these societies to undertake the care in old age of as many nurses as their responsibility to the public and to the government (for war time) made it necessary for them to have.

While this made it hard for individual nurses, it really hastened the day when public opinion was ready to agree that the nurse had a right to a life of her own and to the money that she earned.

Nurses left the Red Cross service in large numbers to work independently at private duty, and newer nursing associations, such as the

Eppendorf-Hamburg and Victoria House, made much more liberal provision for their members than anything previously.

A still newer association, the Diakonie-Verein, although requiring its members to be of the Protestant religion, declares principles of great liberality in all directions, and specially emphasizes the necessity of economic and personal freedom. In some of its details it seems almost like a coöperation.

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(To be continued.)

CONTINUOUS IRRIGATION OF THE TISSUES

AT St. Bartholomew's Hospital I learned of a very interesting and, to me, new treatment—namely, irrigation of the tissues by continuous infusion of normal salt solution. It is used in various conditions. One case which Miss Stewart described to me was that of a nurse who, as the result of an acute inflammation, showed grave symptoms of septicæmia of so overpowering a nature that her family were telegraphed for. She received the continuous salt-solution infusion for something over twelve hours with wonderful results of rapid improvement. The head sister of a surgical ward told me she had also had patients who had had it for twelve hours continuously. The details of the nursing care are as follows: The solution is poured into an open-mouthed sterile flask, because two needles are used, and the tubes to which they are attached are fastened to glass pipettes held by a cross-piece to the flask. The flask of solution stands in a water-bath placed over a spirit-lamp on the bedside table at such a height that the water-bath remains at a temperature of 120°. A thermometer in the flask records the degree of heat. This degree is maintained because the tubing is very long and slender and the physicians calculated that the solution would be just the right temperature on entering the tissues. The needles are inserted in the thighs, one on each side. The nurse must keep the flask filled with solution, must watch the needles that nothing happens to them, and must do the necessary things for the patient without disturbing them. Should the flow be too rapid, it is checked by pinching the tubes with fine clamps. In twelve hours' time about eleven pints of fluid are infused. The patient, of course, passes a large quantity of urine, and the tissues are completely washed out. The management of the patient without disturbing the needles is a delicate and skilful little bit of nursing care and handling.

